

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

First Dispatch of Silas Deane 1776

Paris, August 18, 1776

... I left that city [Bordeaux] on the last of June, and arrived here the Saturday following. ... I spent at Angouleme a day in viewing what, as to manufactures alone, deserves attention on the journey; the foundry for cannon, where the greatest part of those used in the kingdom are manufactured. The cannon are cast solid, after which they are put as in a turner's lathe, and bored out, and the outside smoothed and turned at pleasure; they can bore and complete a twelve pounder in one day in each lathe, which takes four men only to work; the workmen freely showed me every part of their furnace and foundry. ...

M. Dubourg told me that the ministers would not see me, as they meant to be quite secret in any countenance they gave the United Colonies. ... I showed him my commission, and told him I was determined to apply; for every circumstance, in my opinion, was favorable instead of otherwise. On this he wrote a letter to Count de Vergennes, asking liberty to introduce me the Thursday following, on which day I went to Versailles, and though the letter had not been delivered to his excellency, yet he gave us immediate admission. Fortunately his chief secretary spoke English well, by which means I had an opportunity of conversing freely with him on the subject of my commission for two hours, and was attentively and favorably heard by him, and was asked many questions, which shows that the American disputes had been, and still were a principal object of attention. I pursued nearly the line marked out by my instructions, stating ... that I was purchasing a large quantity of manufactures for which I expected to pay the money, and that I should want a quantity of military stores, for which remittances would be made. That I doubted not the Colonies had before this declared independency, and that I should soon receive instructions in consequence, more full and explicit; that in the mean time they were very anxious to know how such a declaration would be received by the powers in Europe, particularly by France, and whether, in such case, an ambassador would be received from them, &c.

To which he replied, that the importance of the American commerce was well known, ... for which reason the court had ordered their ports to be kept open and equally free to America, as to Britain. That, considering the good understanding between the two courts of Versailles and London, they could not openly encourage the shipping of warlike stores, but no obstruction of any kind would be given. ... That I was under his

immediate protection, and should I meet with any difficulty, either from their police, with the rules of which he supposed me unacquainted, or from any other quarter, I had but to apply to him and every thing should be settled. That as to independency it was an event in the womb of time, and it would be highly improper for him to say any thing on that subject, until it had actually taken place.

I most sincerely thanked him for his protection and assistance so generously offered. .

After many questions ... he put this, in which I thought he seemed interested,—whether, if the Colonies declare an independency, they would not differ among themselves? To this I replied, that the greatest harmony had as yet subsisted, and I had no grounds to doubt it in future; that the common danger, which first drove them into measures, which must end in such a declaration, would subsist, and that alone was sufficient to ensure their union.

It is by no means probable that Europe will long remain in a state of peace; the disputes between Portugal and Spain are on the point of producing an open rupture; the former relies on England; the latter will look to this kingdom, and has already applied to this Court on the subject. Nothing but the division of Poland has taken the king of Prussia's attention off from the injustice done him by Great Britain, at the close of the last war. He has now completed his part of the extraordinary work, and I am well informed, listens with pleasure to the dispute between the United Colonies and Great Britain. He is ambitious of becoming a maritime power, and is already in possession of the capital ports on the Baltic; but without commerce it is impossible to effect the design, and no commerce can put him so directly in the road as the American. ... In case of a war in Europe, France, Spain and Prussia might be brought into one interest, and the emperor of Germany is too closely connected with his majesty of France to take part against them, after which Great Britain, having her whole force employed in America, there could be nothing on the one hand to prevent Spain and France from reducing Portugal to a submission to the former, nor from Prussia and France subduing and incorporating into their own dominions Hanover, and the other little mercenary electorates, which lie between them, and which for several centuries have been one principal cause of every war that has happened in Europe.

... Not to enlarge on this plan at present, I have only to suggest, that application to the king of Prussia will do no harm, and may be attended with good and great consequences. ...

... I was directed to apply for arms and clothes for 25,000 men, and for 100 field pieces, with ammunition and stores in proportion. This I wished to get of the ministry direct, but they evaded it, and I am now in treaty for procuring them, through the agency of Mons. Chaumont and Mons. Beaumarchais, on a credit of eight months, from the time of their delivery. If I effect this, as I undoubtedly shall, I must rely on the remittances being made this fall and winter without fail, or the credit of the Colonies must suffer. . . .

Without intelligence from April to this time, leaves me quite uncertain and extremely anxious about the line of conduct now pursuing by Congress, and consequently I cannot, without further intelligence and instructions, proceed in my negotiation either with safety or honor.

The resolution of Congress of the 15th of May, is not considered by the ministry as a declaration of independence, but only a previous step, and until this decisive step is taken, I can do little more to any purpose. . . . I must therefore urge this measure, if not already taken, and that the declaration be in the most full and explicit terms. . . .

Thus I have in a minute, possible a tedious detail, mentioned every thing material on my mind, which has occurred since my arrival, and submit the whole to the wisdom and candor of the honorable Congress, observing that I had gone to the extent of my instructions, and . . . I have been successful beyond my expectations. . .

... I am with the highest esteem and respect for the honorable Congress and their committee of Secret Correspondence, &c.

SILAS DEANE

Source

"*Emperor Dead*" and Other Historic American Dispatches, Edited by
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